Pastoral Relationships

Pastoral Relationships are:
- Established by three partners - the presbytery, the congregation or session (for temporary relationships), and the individual serving in the pastoral role.
- Either installed or temporary

Installed pastoral relationships:
- Are “pastor”, “co-pastor”, “associate pastor”
- May be for a designated term or indefinite.
- Have no requirement to be “full-time”.

Temporary pastoral relationships:
- Session invites for service
- May be teaching elder (PC(USA) or other), PC(USA) candidate, or ruling elder
- Titles determined by presbytery
- Term may be up to 12 months, renewable
- Ordinarily not eligible to become installed

Questions for consideration:
1. What positions are appropriate to be installed positions?
2. Which are better suited to temporary pastoral relations?
3. When might it enhance mission possibilities to install a pastor for a designated term?
4. How will you work with sessions to understand and consider the options for pastoral relationships?
5. How will you review term pastoral relationships?
6. Will you consider exceptions (G.0504). If so, what exceptions and under what circumstances?
7. What positions are suitable for a first call?

Resources:
- See New Times, New Call
- Resources are available online as you explore models for ministry.

G-2.0502 Teaching elders have membership in the presbytery by action of the presbytery itself, and no pastoral relationship may be established, changed, or dissolved without the approval of the presbytery.

G-2.0504 Pastoral Relationships
a. Installed Pastoral Relationships
The installed pastoral relationships are pastor, co-pastor, and associate pastor. A teaching elder may be installed in a pastoral relationship for an indefinite period or for a designated term determined by the presbytery in consultation with the congregation and specified in the call.

b. Temporary Pastoral Relationships
Temporary pastoral relationships are approved by the presbytery and do not carry a formal call or installation. When a congregation does not have a pastor, or while the pastor is unable to perform her or his duties, the session, with the approval of presbytery, may obtain the services of a teaching elder, candidate, or ruling elder in a temporary pastoral relationship. No formal call shall be issued and no formal installation shall take place.

Titles and terms of service for temporary relationships shall be determined by the presbytery. A person serving in a temporary pastoral relationship is invited for a specified period not to exceed twelve months in length, which is renewable with the approval of the presbytery. A teaching elder employed in a temporary pastoral relationship is ordinarily not eligible to serve as the next installed pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor.

G-2.0504 c. Exceptions
A presbytery may determine that its mission strategy permits a teaching elder currently called as an Associate Pastor to be eligible to serve as the next installed pastor or co-pastor, or a teaching elder employed in a temporary pastoral relationship to be eligible to serve as the next installed pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor. Presbyteries that permit this eligibility shall establish such relationships only by a three-fourths vote of the members of presbytery present and voting.

From 2011-2013 Advisory Handbook for Ministry Committees/Commissions
Dissolving the Installed Pastoral Relationship

There are three different ways that the dissolution of an installed pastoral relationship may be initiated:

- **At the request of the pastor, co-pastor or associate pastor.** Teaching elders often make the request for dissolution of the pastoral relationship because they have accepted another call for service or wish to retire. A teaching elder makes his or her request for dissolution to presbytery and informs the session so that session may call a meeting of the congregation for the purpose of considering the teaching elder’s request for dissolution of the pastoral relationship. *(G-2.0902)*

- **At the request of the congregation.** The congregation may also request the dissolution of the pastoral relationship. Such a request is often due to difficulties between the congregation and the teaching elder and the teaching elder may or may not be in agreement with the request of the congregation. At the request of the congregation, the session shall call the meeting and request the presbytery to appoint a moderator for the meeting. *(G-2.0903)*

- **By presbytery action.** The presbytery may, on occasion, look into reported difficulties within a congregation. In the course of such an inquiry and after consultation with the minister, the session, and the congregation, the presbytery may find that the church’s mission under the Word “imperatively demands” the dissolution of the pastoral relationship and take steps toward dissolution. *(G-2.0904)*

As soon as a request for dissolution of an installed pastoral relationship comes to the attention of the presbytery, presbytery should be prepared to assist the pastor and congregation through the process of pastoral transitions according to the Book of Order and presbytery policies and procedures.
The Congregational Meeting

No matter who initiates proceedings for dissolution of the pastoral relationship, there shall always be a meeting of the congregation to consider the matter. At that meeting the congregation may act to consent, or decline to consent, to the dissolution. (G-2.0901)

Action at the meeting of the congregation should be sure to include the effective date of dissolution and any agreed upon final terms of compensation or severance.

Presbytery will want to ensure that an appropriate moderator has been appointed to moderate the meeting of the congregation, especially if the request for dissolution was initiated due to difficulties or conflict.

Presbytery Action

While a congregation may consent or decline to consent to the dissolution of the pastoral relationship, an installed pastoral relationship is dissolved only by the presbytery. (G-2.0901)

As with the congregation, presbytery action on the dissolution of the pastoral relationship should also include the effective date of dissolution and any agreed upon final terms of compensation or severance. Presbytery should also be sure that appropriate action regarding the teaching elder’s presbytery membership be taken. This might include:

- Any change in presbytery membership (validated ministry, member-at-large, honorably retired),
- Transfer to another presbytery,
- Exclusion or release from ordered ministry, or
- Any other appropriate actions.

When Parties Do Not Agree on Dissolution

When all parties are in agreement, action to dissolve a pastoral relationship is not usually controversial. However, there may be times when certain parties do not agree with the request to dissolve the pastoral relationship, requiring the presbytery to hear from the disagreeing parties.

From 2011-2013 Advisory Handbook for Ministry Committees/Commissions
If the congregation does not concur with the request to dissolve the relationship, the presbytery shall hear from the congregation, through its elected commissioners, the reasons why the presbytery should not dissolve the pastoral relationship. If the congregation fails to appear, or if its reasons for retaining the relationship are judged insufficient, the request may be granted and the pastoral relationship dissolved. (G-2.0902)

If the pastor does not concur with the request to dissolve the relationship, the presbytery shall hear from him or her the reasons why the presbytery should not dissolve the relationship. If the pastor fails to appear, or if the reasons for maintaining the relationship are judged insufficient, the relationship may be dissolved. (G-2.0903)

Presbyteries are encouraged to consider and plan for particular ways to be pastor and counselor to affected parties and to facilitate relationships during and following any contested dissolution.

The Pastoral Transition

During this time of pastoral change in the life of the congregation, the presbytery has the responsibility to oversee this transition by serving as pastor, counselor, and advisor to teaching elders and congregations. (G-3.0301 & G-3.0307)

There are a number of issues a presbytery may wish to address and plan for to assist in a smooth transition for congregations and teaching elders. These may include:

- Ethics for departing pastors
- Exit interviews
- Temporary pastoral leadership, including pulpit supply and session moderator
- Calling of the next installed pastor

G-2.0902 Pastor, Co-Pastor or Associate Pastor Requests
If the congregation does not concur, the presbytery shall hear from the congregation, through its elected commissioners, the reasons why the presbytery should not dissolve the pastoral relationship. If the congregation fails to appear, or if its reasons for retaining the relationship are judged insufficient, the request may be granted and the pastoral relationship dissolved.

G-2.0903 Congregation Requests
If the pastor does not concur with the request to dissolve the relationship, the presbytery shall hear from him or her the reasons why the presbytery should not dissolve the relationship. If the pastor fails to appear, or if the reasons for maintaining the relationship are judged insufficient, the relationship may be dissolved.

G-3.0301 Composition and Responsibilities
...the presbytery has responsibility and power to:
- provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard. This responsibility shall include...
- overseeing congregations without pastors...

G-3.0307 Pastor, Counselor, and Advisor to Teaching Elders and Congregations
...oversight of congregations without pastors...
Questions for presbytery consideration and discussion:

1. How does the presbytery handle uncontested pastoral dissolutions? What about contested dissolutions?

2. How are severance agreements negotiated? What does a standard agreement include?

3. How does the presbytery fulfill its responsibility to serve as pastor, counselor, and advisor to teaching elders and congregations during this time of transition for a congregation and a teaching elder?

4. When does the search for a new pastor begin?

Resources:
- Exit Interviews
- Ethics for Departing Pastors
- Temporary Pastoral Relationships
- Calling an Installed Pastor
- Electing a Pastor Nominating Committee
Exit Interviews

Exit interviews, while not required at the dissolution of a pastoral relationship, may be a helpful tool for presbyteries to consider as a regular step in the departure of a pastor. This is true whether the person leaving the congregation is a temporary pastor who has served the church for a few months or an installed pastor who is leaving after a number of years.

Exit interviews can be an opportunity to reflect on the ministry the pastor and congregation had together, its strengths and weaknesses, and be one step in the process of closure in the relationship between congregation and pastor. Information gathered through an exit interview may also be helpful in informing the congregation’s future direction for ministry, especially as they call their next pastor.

A presbytery that uses exit interviews will want to find and implement a process that is most effective for their particular ministry context.

An Exit Interview Model

With the Departing Pastor. The presbytery conducts the exit interview with the departing pastor soon after the pastor announces his or her departure. Questions to be asked and topics to be covered may include:

1. Ask the pastor to talk about things she/he feels good about in ministry with the congregation.

2. Ask about barriers to effective ministry. These barriers might be in the congregation, or community, or with the pastor.

3. Ask about the relationship between the pastor, the session and the congregation, including any difficulties or conflict.

4. Ask about advice the pastor might want give to the next pastor.

5. Review with the pastor the presbytery’s expectations regarding appropriate and inappropriate contact between the pastor and congregation after the pastor’s departure. This is especially important if the pastor is staying in town or moving to a nearby location.

G-2.0905 Officiate by Invitation Only

After the dissolution of the pastoral relationship, former pastors and associate pastors shall not provide their pastoral services to members of their former congregations without the invitation of the moderator of session.

From 2011-2013 Advisory Handbook for Ministry Committees/Commissions
With the Session. The presbytery conducts the exit interview with the session after the pastoral relationship has departed. It is helpful for the moderator of session appointed by presbytery to be present for this interview. Questions to be asked and topics to be covered may include:

1. Ask about the positive growth in the life of the congregation during the pastor’s time with the congregation.

2. Ask about barriers to effective ministry. These barriers might be in the congregation, or community, or the pastor.

3. Ask about the relationship between the pastor, the session and the congregation, including any difficulties or conflict.

4. Review with the session, the presbytery’s expectations regarding appropriate and inappropriate contact with between the pastor and congregation after the pastor’s departure. This is especially important if the pastor is staying in town or moving to a nearby location.

5. Begin discussion about maintaining regular worship and congregational life during the transition and search for new pastoral leadership.

Resource:

- Ethics for Departing Pastors
The bonds of care and love which have been forged between pastor and congregation over the span of ministry together often leads to the desire to remain connected even after the pastoral relationship ends. While it is understandable when church members want the pastor “who knows us” to baptize their child, the bonds of care and love between the church members and the current pastor cannot be forged and strengthened if a former pastor steps in to provide this pastoral service.

When a teaching elder is leaving a particular congregation or ministry setting where he or she has served in a pastoral role, presbytery will want to ensure that expectations of departing pastors are communicated clearly to both the departing pastor and the congregation. The primary expectation is that when the pastoral relationship ends so does the pastor’s participation in any future pastoral service to members of the congregation. Presbytery may wish to elaborate on how this is lived out within the presbytery, especially regarding: (G-2.0905)

- Attendance at any church events, including weddings, baptisms, and funerals.
- Continuation of friendships, including future conversations about the church.
- Providing any leadership for congregational worship, education or fellowship events.
- How the pastor is to respond to requests from church members, so as to not to pass the responsibility for the decision on to the presbytery and/or the moderator of session.

While the Book of Order leaves open the possibility of providing future pastoral services at “the invitation of the moderator of session,” a presbytery may wish to engage the departing pastor in conversation about how to handle such invitations. (G-2.0905)

Questions for presbytery consideration and discussion:

1. What are presbytery’s expectations about former pastors’ involvements in the life of congregations previously served?
2. Does the presbytery have an ethical standards policy? If so, are these expectations included?
3. How are presbyteries policies and/or expectations communicated to a departing pastor and congregation? What role is the pastor expected to play in communicating this to the congregation?
4. How does the presbytery handle any violations of this ethical standard?

Resources:
- Standards of Ethical Conduct. Approved by the 210th General Assembly (1998)